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ABSTRACT

The structures of and issues facing vocational education and training (VET) in the United States and Canada were compared. Selected findings were as follows: (1) VET in the United States is shifting focus from preparing students for entry-level jobs to greater emphasis on academic preparation and a wider range of career choices; (2) U.S. community colleges focus implicitly and explicitly on their regional communities, continue to be recognized for their democratizing value, and enroll more than 40% of all students in U.S. postsecondary institutions; (3) compared with universities, Canada's community colleges typically offer more job-related curricula, focus more on off-campus delivery, feature a more interactive teaching style, and have more inclusive entry criteria; and (4) as of 1993, priority issues for Canadian VET included relevance, lifelong learning, restructuring, image parity with academic education, and leadership and educational quality. Issues identified as facing VET in the United States included the shift from a manufacturing base to services and information, changing education and skill requirements, changing workplace practices, and school reform efforts. Issues identified as facing VET in Canada included the need for postsecondary education to contribute to cultural and social capital and educational institutions being seen by society as an expense rather than an asset. A glossary and list of 12 references are included. (MN)

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VET in the United States of America and Canada

The structure of VET in the USA:

- VET in the USA is in transition, shifting from preparation of students for entry-level jobs towards greater emphasis on academic preparation and a wider range of career choices.
- Increasingly, academic and vocational education are integrated.
- VET policy now encourages high school students to continue their studies at the postsecondary level, and 2-year postsecondary students to pursue 4-year credentials through various articulation or "tech-prep" arrangements.
- Many community colleges are now involved in workforce preparation and economic development: contract training; small business assistance and incubation; and regional economic planning. (See Glossary)
- According to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, there are 11 million secondary and postsecondary VET students in the USA.
- About 9,400 postsecondary institutions offer technical programs, including community colleges, technical institutes, skill centres and other public and private 2 and 4 year colleges.
- Programs receive about $1.3 billion annually from the federal government through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. That represents about 8-10 % of budgets for these programs, which receive most of their funding from local and state revenue.
- Community colleges focus implicitly and explicitly on their regional economies. This influences range of programs and priorities.
- Prior to the 1963 Vocational Education Act most two year colleges were defacto junior colleges aiming to transfer students to four year colleges.
- In the 1960's colleges' vocational programs expanded, but tended to duplicate programs in the secondary schools.
- Because there is no separate legislation covering vocational education at the college level, it suffers from having to compete for funds with high school vocational education programs.
- Community colleges have always been recognised for their democratizing value. Through their open enrolment policies they have historically provided access to educational opportunities for many people unable to qualify (or pay) for the more prestigious schools or acquire the skills they needed in high school.
- There is growing competition from proprietary schools, for-profit and corporate universities and distance-learning companies. Private colleges do not have to offer a broad range of programs, and can therefore focus on capturing narrow niches in the work-related education market. In response, many community colleges are increasing their offerings of short-term programs.
- Community colleges enrol over 40% of total students in USA postsecondary institutions.
- The vast majority of students who enrol in postsecondary education in the USA are pursuing a higher level credential than the one they already possess.

<u>Sources:</u>

http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~iee/ccrc
http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/index.asp
http://oeri4.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/NAVE/
http://www.avaonline.org/

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The structure of VET in Canada:

- Community colleges in Canada are known as institutes of technology, cégeps, and university colleges.
- Formerly offered diplomas and certificates, not degrees, but now many have university transfer programs and some offer degrees.
- 450,000 full-time and 1.5 million part-time learners.
- Over 900 campuses, more than 30,000 faculty.
- Colleges average 5,000 full-time and 15,000 part-time students.
- Typically a more job-related curriculum than universities, featuring smaller classes, off-campus course delivery, a more interactive teaching style and more inclusive entry criteria.
- Generally the primary community vehicle for adult education and employee updating.
- Offer employment-related programs such as apprenticeship and continuing education courses.
- Significant numbers of university graduates attend college after completing their degree in order to acquire vocational skills for employment. As a result, the average age of full-time college students is between 26 and 28.
- Institutions link with business and industry, and offer co-operative and in-industry training programs.
- Curricula are derived from industry-based sources and programs are reviewed by industry-based advisory committees.
- Each province and territory has governance over its curriculum, goals and standards, program delivery, and financing.
- College budgets vary from $9M to $120M per year. They receive 45% to 80% of their funding from provincial or territorial governments, with the remainder coming from student fees (up to 20%), and private and public industry contracts (up to 35%).
- Priority issues for Canadian vocational education identified at a national forum in 1993: relevance, lifelong learning, restructuring, image parity with academic education, shared vision, new basics, partnerships, technology courses, leadership and educational quality.
- Canada's colleges promote themselves as 'catalysts for change,' helping to ensure Canada's international competitiveness.
- Applied research is a growing trend in Canadian community colleges as a means of keeping faculty current, attracting high-quality instructional staff, increasing the relevance of their programs, and developing a positive image in the community, which in turn attracts students and increases job opportunities for graduates.

Sources:
http://www.accc.ca/CollegeCanada/
http://www.accc.ca/english/Colleges/

About.com's Votech site has an excellent guide to choosing between a votech school and a college, that clearly and simply outlines the differences between the two. It also explains the difference between two and four year colleges. Go to:
http://votech.about.com/education/votech/library/weekly/aa120298.htm

Partnerships with business

Several national business organizations and associations in the USA are active in educational improvement and reform. See their sites for details:

Business Coalition for Educational Reform
www.bcer.org
National Alliance of Business:
www.nab.com
American Council on Education
www.acenet.edu/programs/bhef/
Committee for Economic Development
www.ced.org/docs/improvin.htm
Council on Competitiveness
www.compete.org
National Employer Leadership Council
www.nelc.org

Issues for VET in the USA

Economic trends (shift from manufacturing base to services and information)

Changing education & skill requirements (greater need for critical thinking, personal responsibility and social skills)

Need for research to determine more appropriate performance measures for community colleges, given changes in how students access training (eg. multiple enrolments, 'competence without credentials', 'experimenters,' non-credit activity)

Workplace practices (flexible and decentralised work practices, multi-skilled workers)

Employer perspectives on employees (particularly important in the short term)

Participation rates in high school Voc Ed (generally declining)

Characteristics of high school students participating in Voc Ed (number of students with disabilities has increased, while all other minority groups have remained constant)

Academic course-taking trends (vocational concentrators have increased their coursetaking in core academic subjects)

School reform efforts (some public comprehensive high schools have begun to integrate academic and vocational education)

Vocational teacher qualifications and experience (same proportion of vocational as academic high school teachers hold bachelor's degrees; vocational teachers are generally older than academic teachers)

Issues for VET in Canada

Postsecondary education should contribute to social and cultural capital, and support both local and global economic performance.

Six key areas identified as society's expectations: quality, accessibility, mobility and portability, relevance and responsiveness, research and scholarship, accountability.

To ensure lifelong learning the country must have a healthy, responsive postsecondary education system.

New international discourse of cooperation is underpinned by recognition of environmental fragilities and interdependence.

Future premium will be on individuals who can generate, access and adapt knowledge.

Vocational education's purpose is to prepare students for employment, and it should emphasise work attitudes and higher order skills.

Educational institutions being seen by society as an expense rather than an asset.

Key Terms

Contract training:
Community colleges enter a much closer relationship with employers than was the case with traditional occupational education. Employers no longer advisors but customers who contract with the college for training. Employers then become the main clients for the training and students become secondary clients. Contracted programs are usually customized to the employers' wishes.

Local economic planning:
Many community colleges monitor the economic environment for social and economic trends, and pass this information on to employers, government agencies, and the community. They participate directly and indirectly in efforts to forecast and shape the economic future of their locality.

Parity of esteem:
A goal sometimes invoked by countries which are trying to develop vocational credentials that can serve as a step to university education. More common concern today is that vocational and academic pathways be integrated to prepare the workforce for a working environment that requires underpinning academic (eg critical thinking, problem-solving) skills in traditional vocational contexts and that has broadened the concept of 'career' to include the notion of continual learning.

Reverse transfer:
Degree holders enrolling in community college programs.

School-to-work:
Career-related education that seeks to ensure that all students have knowledge of career pathways and opportunities for work-based learning.

Small business assistance:
Some community colleges provide owners and managers of small and medium sized businesses not only with employee training but also with managerial advice and training.

Small business incubation:
Community colleges which act as business incubators provide low cost space and administrative support for the first few months or years of a new firm's life.

Tech prep:
Programs which link high school and college curricula to help students make a smooth transition to postsecondary education and careers.

Votech:
Community colleges, technical institutes and career schools are all 'votech' education facilities. Sharply employment focussed, some have excellent reputations in very specific fields, with credentials regarded as a "ticket to ride."

Interesting current research in US VET:

Community College/Cluster Connections: Specialization and Competitiveness in the U.S. and Europe (Stuart Rosenfeld)

Learning and Earning in the Middle: The Economic Benefits of Sub-Baccalaureate Education (Norton Grubb)

Four-Year Graduates Attending Community Colleges: A New Meaning of the Term "Second Chance" (John Quinley)

Curriculum and Pedagogy to Integrate Occupational and Academic Instruction in the Community College: Implications for Faculty Development (Dolores Perin)

Multiple Missions of Community Colleges: Conflicting or Complementary? (Thomas Bailey and Irina Averianova)

These and other papers are available, often in full text, at: http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~iee/ccrc/Ccreareas.htm

Other references:

Center Work v4 n2 1993. *The changing role of vocational-technical education in the United States.* (ERIC No. ED 361527)

U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. 2000. *Vocational Education in the United States: Toward the Year 2000,* by Karen Levesque, Doug Lauen, Peter Teitelbaum, Martha Alt, and Sally Librera. Washington, D.C.

Rosenfeld, S. 1999. *Linking Measures of Quality and Success at Community Colleges to Individual Goals and Customer Needs* National Assessment of Vocational Education (http://oeri4.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/NAVE/rosenPart1.html)

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. 1999. *A report on public expectations of postsecondary education in Canada.* Toronto, Ontario. http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/expectations.en.pdf

Educating America: an investment for our future http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/CEA/html/education.html

Legislation related to vocational education in the USA:http://vocserve.berkeley.edu/LegislationLinks.html

21st Century Skills for 21st Century Jobs http://vpskillsummit.org/bestprct.asp.

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